

HOUSE RESOLUTION 95

By Cooper

A RESOLUTION to recognize the historical significance of the Clayborn Temple in Memphis.

WHEREAS, the members of this legislative body take great pleasure in recognizing those edifices of historical import, buildings that have played a role in stories that are vital to our State's history; and

WHEREAS, Clayborn Temple in Memphis is one of the most significant landmarks of the Civil Rights Movement, and, as such, it is being considered by the State Review Board for national significance in the National Register of Historic Places; and

WHEREAS, Clayborn Temple was initially placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979, listed as the Second Presbyterian Church, for its architectural significance as an ecclesiastical example of the Romanesque Revival style; continued listing on the register would ensure protective review of federal projects that might adversely affect the character of the historic property, as well as provide funding opportunities for restoration projects; and

WHEREAS, the building traces its beginnings back to 1887, when the congregation of the Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis purchased a lot on the corner of Hernando and Pontotoc streets; under the leadership of Reverend Neander Woods, the cornerstone of the church building was laid on February 2, 1891, thus commencing construction of what would be the largest church building in America south of the Ohio River at the time; and

WHEREAS, the Second Presbyterian Church worshiped in the building for over fifty years, at which time the congregation sought a new campus outside of the downtown area; a congregation of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church purchased the property in 1949; and

WHEREAS, the members of the AME congregation named their new place of worship Clayborn Temple in honor of AME Bishop Jim Clayborn; the Clayborn Temple AME Church would remain in this building until the 1990s, all the while ensuring that the stained glass windows and architecture original to the building remained intact; and

WHEREAS, during the 1960s, the building became a meeting and organizational hub for the Civil Rights Movement in the region; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., visited Clayborn Temple on multiple occasions; and

WHEREAS, under the leadership of Reverend Benjamin Booker, Clayborn Temple served as a safe haven for gatherings to plan, strategize, and implement efforts for racial equality in Memphis, the most well-known of which is the Sanitation Workers' Strike of 1968; and

WHEREAS, in addition to hosting planning and strategy meetings for the Sanitation Workers' Strike, Clayborn Temple served as the daily starting point of the over two-month-long strike; it also served as the distribution point for the iconic "I Am A Man" signs associated with the strike; and

WHEREAS, the strikers sought refuge inside the church when a peaceful march led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., turned violent after youths unrelated to the march began breaking windows; and

WHEREAS, after decades of non-use, Clayborn Temple is now on track for restoration; the goal is not only to preserve the building but also to utilize it once again as a place of worship and gathering, a symbol for the new Memphis that is growing within the city, particularly downtown; and

WHEREAS, Clayborn Temple stands as a reminder of the trials of the segregated Jim Crow South, of the resilience of those who so bravely led the charge against inequality during the Civil Rights Movement, and of the importance of finding refuge—in each other and in the brick-and-mortar safe harbors that bring us together; and

WHEREAS, the restoration and upkeep of Clayborn Temple are essential to the continuance of its legacy, and it is fitting that this legislative body recognize the importance of this structure and its role in our State's history; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED TENTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, that we hereby recognize the historical significance of Clayborn Temple, a landmark of the Civil Rights Movement in Memphis, and extend our best wishes to the stewards of this storied structure for much success in preserving and continuing its legacy.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.